

## Culture



**Peter HARRIES-JONES (ed.), *Making Knowledge Count: Advocacy and Social Science*, Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. 250 pages, (cloth)**

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women is public opprobrium. Unlike the Mossi who treat conjugal relations as a very private realm, Goin are vocal to the point of theatricality over marital disputes. Subjecting men to public embarrassment is a favorite weapon of Goin women.

The essay on health is based on close observation of some 120 defined cases of illness, and of the approaches of five traditional healers in the rural village of Gouera, population 1,500. In addition, the study draws on comparative studies that have been done in French on neighboring societies — Bonnet on Mossi; Fainzang on Bisa; Jacob on Winye; Sindzingre and Zempleni on Senoufo. Dacher argues that the Goin are especially resistant to new therapies because they threaten their unique social structure. Thus, although the Goin have etiological categories of disease similar to their neighbors, they show important differences which reflect their unique social structure. The strongly individualistic Goin see illness and therapy as private and even secret matters. Each healer has his own recipes for medicines and his own individual approach to therapy. Dacher makes the significant and credible claim that Goin therapies vary so widely because the symbols which make up their world view no longer, and may never have, constituted a formal system of thought.

The argument, however, that the Goin are particularly resistant to Western bio-medicine is not convincing. Janzen and others have shown that Africans share with people all over the world a pragmatic ability to evaluate different therapies on the basis of efficacy and cost effectiveness, and to be eclectic in their choices. In fact, it is unlikely that the Goin are as isolated from other medical therapies as might be suggested from the narrow perspective of a single remote village. Even in the village of Gouera, Dacher cites the case of a nearby Fulbe healer who was consulted for a bad toothache. She also notes the villagers' expressed wish to have a real dispensary with their own trained nurse "to give injections" ("faire des piqûres"), an allusion no doubt to positive experiences in the past, possibly to anti-smallpox and other vaccination campaigns which began after the Second World War. Finally, it seems odd that the Goin can live so close to the Jula and not begin to be influenced by Muslim therapies, if not in the isolated village, than surely in the larger towns. This is an important book for specialists in anthropology and health in Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast, but the absence of data on changes occurring in larger Goin towns makes it less valuable than its subject matter gave reason to expect.

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By Peter Armitage

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*Making Knowledge Count* is a welcome addition to a still limited literature on advocacy and the social sciences. In a smorgasbord of case studies of advocacy research in action in Canada and other parts of the world, Peter Harries-Jones and his contributing authors have provided a useful overview of how, why, and in what contexts social science research can be married to political advocacy. The collection provides a quick peek at various methodological, epistemological, and ethical concerns that permeate advocacy research while guiding us through several advocacy research domains such as human rights in Chile, refugee policy in Canada, ethnic/race relations, peace advocacy, gender and labour relations, critical pedagogy, feminist and daycare advocacy. Harries-Jones' insightful introductions throughout the book save it from incoherence because they define key terms, flag dilemmas, frame the research issues, and explore interconnections between themes and arguments.

Harries-Jones points to one obvious weakness in the collection at the outset, namely, the lack of a contribution on ecological advocacy and social science. However, the book suffers from several other weaknesses that diminish its utility as a teaching tool and vehicle for in-depth debate and analysis of advocacy research's merits and dilemmas. For example, very little attention is given to the crucial role that mass media plays in constraining or facilitating advocacy work and in shaping public attitudes and policy-making processes. The collection would have benefitted greatly from an article devoted exclusively to the interface between advocacy researchers and journalists in order to explore issues such as the constraints placed on advocacy discourse in meeting the requirements of "sound bites," "good visuals" and other elements of news work, as well as challenges to the credibility of social scientists when they engage in advocacy.

Despite Harries-Jones' statement that advocacy thrives on reflexive circularities, there is very little reflexivity in this collection as it relates to an examination of ethical, epistemological and methodological problems of conducting advocacy research. A

few teasers are thrown to the reader from time-to-time (e.g. Morgan's comments on dogmatic advocacy), but these simply beg multiple questions that are left unexplored. For example, what consequences will different advocacy and research methods have for advocacy's clients in terms of policy-making, the type of social problems constructed, and the way such problems are solved? What are the power effects of different types of discourse including advocacy discourse (see Piron, *Culture*, 1992)? Regrettably, *Making Knowledge Count* does little to answer these questions so that we might learn about the difficulties of "role contamination" when an "objective" social scientist plays "media theatre director," or about the consequences of self-censorship when "sensitive" information is cut from a report or ethnography because it may have adverse political effects.

Another concern: Harries-Jones states that advocacy through empowerment is *advocacy with* rather than *advocacy for* a client or class of clients, promoting the idea that advocacy researchers should be more facilitators and intellectual resources than political agents who work on behalf of relatively passive clients. Heyworth makes this idea the main focus of her article by arguing for the abandonment of paternalistic research methods which too frequently disempower the subjects of research. It is unfortunate that the other contributors did not give greater attention to this point because it is at the heart of many of the internal problems that besiege social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) when advocacy researchers and "experts" obtain too much control over the production and use of knowledge.

More serious, however, is the risk that advocacy research will lead to the kind of social engineering and human management policies that are typical of modern bureaucracies. When engaged in public information campaigns or "helping professions" (e.g. social work) where "problematic" behaviours are identified in "target populations" that require intervention and change, advocacy researchers may unconsciously accept some of the most pernicious myths of democratic theory and the recalcitrant, deficient public. These myths have to do with the notion that democratic societies are comprised of individuals who make choices in a marketplace of ideas and commodities both as consumers and voters at election time, or when they are considered statistically in public opinion surveys. That such individuals must be "helped" to make rational decisions through public

information campaigns fed by "experts" of one kind or another is central to the mythology, and a gigantic infrastructure of opinion analysis and manipulation has grown up on this basis. Such information campaigns are just one example of how "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1981) are produced and re-inforced; they are simply one avenue by which advocacy researchers may join in a self-serving cycle that guarantees their continued intervention in advocacy relations because both governments and disempowered client populations are dependent on their brokerage roles.

Under such circumstances, in terms of their ultimate disempowering effects on client populations, there may be little difference between the work of advocacy researchers and government planners unless the former are extremely vigilant about their manner of intervention. The issue of intervention, therefore, must not be treated lightly; whether to intervene in the first place, in any shape or form, and the consequences of such intervention are critical issues for researchers. Harries-Jones makes passing reference to the ethical problems of intervention and people management in an introductory preface (p.205) when he discusses scientific management and how it extends the "Administrative Point of View" (APV) to the totality of social science research. However, the warning flags are not waved before the reader in terms of the extension of the APV to advocacy research.

*Making Knowledge Count* will appeal to a diverse audience consisting primarily of senior undergraduate students, sociologists, social workers, educators, political activists, and advocates, as well as government policy and analysis personnel. It will not satisfy all the teaching needs as a single text in courses on public policy or applied/advocacy anthropology and sociology. The book will need to be supplemented with other texts (e.g. Paine, 1985; Dyck and Waldrum, 1993) in order to explore properly the plethora of examples and issues that characterize advocacy research. Nonetheless, the text covers new ground, and is especially useful for students who are contemplating careers outside of academe, in government bureaucracies or development agencies, community groups, and other NGOs where they can put their social science to good use and satisfy their social justice values at the same time.